

ICT Mediated Rumor Spread and Resulting Community Behaviors during a Social Crisis

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Abstract

Developing effective social-technical systems for crisis response requires an understanding of how these systems affect people during emergencies. Recent uprisings in Ferguson and Baltimore show the dark side of ICTs in rumor spread and its derivative social impacts of collective behaviors. In this paper, we study an extreme case of the ICTs-mediated rumor incident - the August 2012 hate rumor targeted toward a specific ethnic community in the technological hub of Bangalore in India - which led to a mass exodus of a targeted group of citizens from their own community. A survey of the targeted citizens suggests that kin ties and communication media characteristics influenced rumor belief, which, in turn, prompted extreme behavioral responses such as mass exodus. Confirming the relevance of rumor belief as a trigger of extreme collective behaviors, we found that people who believed the received rumor as true information took both informational (rumor-spreading) and behavioral (safety-seeking) actions. We also found that people who believed the hate rumors as true messages tended to collectively take more extreme actions (e.g., rush to leave their own community) rather than mild or moderate actions (e.g., check safety of their acquaintances or stay at home without going outside).

Speaker Profile

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